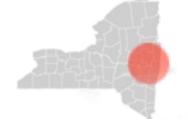


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## Editorial: Budget plan just shifts the burden

If you say you are holding the line on taxes, it should mean you are holding the line on taxes. It doesn't mean shifting the burden from one taxing entity to another, which is what Gov. Eliot Spitzer is doing in his proposed \$124 billion budget.

The governor would, among other things, shift 2 percent of what the state picks up to pay for welfare programs back to the counties, eliminate funding for detaining juvenile delinquents and cut a portion of funding for nursing homes.

In all, according to the New York State Association of Counties, Spitzer would shift \$80 million of what the state now funds to the counties.

The counties have no option but to pay the increases. Welfare is mandated by the government and the counties have no choice but to offer the services they are told to offer. A family court judge orders juvenile delinquents detained in a secure facility so there is no option there either.

While it is not mandated to operate a public nursing home, the 40 counties that do, unlike private facilities, generally care for a majority of clients who are on Medicaid. It is a safety net for the elderly who can't afford to go elsewhere.

Counties have only two sources of revenue: property taxes and sales tax. The argument against raising the sales tax is that it retards overall economic growth. The arguments against raising property taxes are nearly too many to count. The first being we are already among the top five of the highest taxed states in the nation.

The governor claims he is actually adding \$500 million to the counties, but Rensselaer County Executive Kathleen M. Jimino said the majority of that comes from the Medicaid cap, which means it is not saving counties any money; it is just not costing them as much.

If Spitzer's budget is approved, Jimino projects an 8.6 percent property tax hike. Yes, she may be allied to state Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, Spitzer's political nemesis, but Jimino was not afraid to challenge the last governor, a Republican, on budgetary issues either.

The bottom line, according to the counties, and we agree, is that Spitzer is growing the state budget more than his proclaimed 5 percent by shifting costs to other places that will then be forced to raise taxes. When he pledges not to raise taxes, he really means he will not raise state taxes.

Spitzer's budget does raises taxes — even if they aren't state taxes — and we can't afford anymore taxes.

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